



## **Proposed Hanging Lake Area Management Plan White River National Forest**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

#### **Q. Why do we need a Management Plan for the Hanging Lake Area?**

**A.** Hanging Lake, has become one of Colorado's "bucket list and must do" hikes for visitors from all over the world. Hanging Lake is distinctive not only for its beauty but for its geological composition – a large and rare example of a travertine deposition lake and hanging garden plant community.

Visitation to Hanging Lake, a National Natural Landmark, has doubled in the last 5 years. In 2016, approximately 150,000 visitors came to hike the 1.2 mile trail. The uniqueness of the lake, accessibility and widespread promotion has prompted visitation to increase over the years. As visitation to the lake continues to rise, the results are natural resource and facility degradation, safety issues, parking congestion and impacts to the visitor experience.

The proposed plan is intended to address high visitor use and its related issues with an adaptable, long term strategy in order to effectively protect the natural and historic resources, reduce congestion, provide for public safety and quality recreation opportunities, all while achieving long term sustainability for the area and its local tourism related economic benefits.

#### **Q. What kind of degradation is happening at Hanging Lake?**

**A.** High use visitation at the Hanging Lake area over the last decade has resulted in damage to the area's sensitive vegetation, historic resources, and the trail infrastructure within the area. Increased visitation has also created congestion and crowding and illegal parking in the parking lot, crowding on the trail and at the Lake. This congestion causes hikers to step off the trail compacting sensitive soils and damaging vegetation and widening the trail.

#### **Q. How long has the Forest Service been working on management issues at Hanging Lake?**

**A.** An interagency group convened in 2012 to address ongoing safety and management issues. Due to the area's complicated land ownership, unique legal authorities, safety issues, and potential alternative transportation needs the Forest Service partnered with the U.S. Department of Transportation's, John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe Center) in 2013 to assist in facilitation and development of potential short-term, mid-term and long-term solutions. Now after 4 years of implementing short and mid-term operational solutions, the proposed plan represents the next step in the process, which is to arrive at a long term solution that will sustain the Hanging Lake area's natural resources and operations into the future. The Volpe Center's research and site specific studies were used to create the proposed plan.

#### **Q. How did the Forest Service determine the capacity?**

**A.** A daily capacity of 615 was determined through information provided in Volpe's 2016, Capacity Analysis, and the 2017 Transportation and Operations Plan. Several scenarios were analyzed which looked at the capacity of the parking lot, trail, and the lake. The studies examined the movement of visitors through all three of those locations. The capacity study was done to assist the forest in determining the optimal capacity for the site in order to address operational sustainability and issues related to natural resource degradation, congestion, safety, over-crowding and visitor experience.

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**Q. How did the Forest Service determine the need for a shuttle?**

**A.** The need for a shuttle was analyzed in order to address current management issues occurring in the Hanging Lake area. Requiring a shuttle during the peak season (May 1- Oct. 30) addresses current issues of congestion, capacity and public safety and would be used to manage and allocate the daily capacity. During the “off peak” season (Nov. 1 - April 30), the area would be managed to its daily capacity through a fee-based reservation system or permit system and mandatory shuttles would not be required but could still be offered.

**Q. What is adaptive management and how is it being used in the context of this proposal?**

**A.** Utilizing an adaptive management approach helps managers ensure that desired objectives are obtained and the intent of the plan continues to be realized in the face of future changes. Adaptive management defines indicators, thresholds and resulting adaptive management actions that will aid long-term management and potential adjustments needed to ensure Hanging Lake’s natural resources and trail infrastructure are being protected and visitors continue to have positive experiences. The process is meant to be transparent, informative and dynamic with the ultimate goal of adopting a management system for Hanging Lake Area that is implementable and sustainable.

**Q. What is the ultimate goal of the Hanging Lake Management Plan?**

**A.** The overall goal of this management plan is to create and implement a management system for Hanging Lake Area that is implementable, sustainable and meets the following objectives:

- Protect natural resources
- Manage congestion
- Enhance public safety
- Improve visitor experience
- Support local tourism

**Q. Will this proposed Plan implement a reservation system? Will there be a fee?**

**A.** A reservation system would be utilized to ensure that the daily capacity is managed to, thereby meeting the proposed plan’s requirements. Visitors would secure a reservation or “permit” year-round which would define a time of entry either for a shuttle or access in their private vehicle to the Hanging Lake Area. All visitors would secure a reservation/permit year round no matter the mode of transportation to the site.

The reservation system may be managed by a commercial provider, partner organization, Recreation.gov or the Forest Service. A reservation fee most likely will be charged to cover the administrative costs of managing such a system.

The Forest Service can use a number of options to implement a reservation system. The following describes some of the potential tools that are available to implement the decision if the proposed plan becomes final. The options below can be alone or in combination with other alternatives:

1. Utilize Recreation.gov to issue reservations through the National Recreation Reservation Service. There is an administrative fee for this reservation system.
2. Manage capacity through the Outfitter and Guide (O&G) program via its permitting process using the Outfitter and Guide’s reservation system.

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3. Manage capacity through a third party transportation (shuttle) provider's reservation system.
4. Manage capacity through a reservation system and allow for parking on site.
5. Provide for enhanced visitor services and operations in the Hanging Lake area and resource restoration, reclamation, maintenance and protection of the sites resources via instituting a Special Recreation Permit under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) that would generate revenue for sustainable on-site management. This would require following national and regional processes and would include a separate public participation process. This tool may be integrated into the above four options.

**Q. How will the Forest Service enforce this plan?**

**A.** If the proposed plan is adopted, the Forest Service will work with affected agencies and partners, service providers, volunteers, Forest Service Law Enforcement and Forest Service Protection Officers, to implement the plan.

**Q. What benefit would this plan provide to the recreational experience?**

**A.** The proposed plan would provide managers long-term tools to directly address issues that affect visitor experience such as natural resource and facility degradation, congestion and safety concerns. Managing the area to a daily capacity which will ensure that visitors will have opportunities for a positive experience. During the peak season, a shuttle system managed to eliminate congestion and to pace the volume of hikers on site at one time would allow for separation along the trail, at Hanging Lake and Spouting Rock. The proposed plan seeks to provide for enhanced visitor services on and off site with improved interpretation, messaging and on-site staff presence. Providing for opportunities for a higher quality recreation experience also will support and sustain local tourism economies.

**Q. Where is the process/next steps and how can I get involved?**

**A.** The Legal Notice for the proposed plan will be published on Aug. 22, 2017 which will begin the scoping period for the proposed Hanging Lake Management Plan. The scoping period will be 30 days from the publication date in the official paper of record which is the Vail Daily. During the comment period, the Forest Service formally asks the public to look at the proposed Plan and provide feedback, possible solutions and identify information that was not considered. These comments will be helpful to develop the issues addressed in the environmental assessment. It is most helpful to comment during the legal scoping period and keep comments specific to the proposed plan. There will be another opportunity to comment on the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) which will come out sometime in the fall of 2017. Those wishing to gain standing for objection must comment within one of the legal comment periods.

The proposed management plan and associated project documents will be loaded onto the project page the **morning of August 22** at this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50479>.